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SUBJECT: C-RE7-01700: CZECH EU PRESIDENCY PRIORITIES -
"EUROPE WITHOUT BARRIERS"

REF: A. PRAGUE 1089

[1](#)B. PRAGUE 922

[1](#)C. PRAGUE 103

[1](#)1. (U) During a meeting with Embassy Officials, Michal Sedlacek of the Office of the Czech Deputy Prime Minister for EU Affairs, outlined a range of issues related to the Czech EU Presidency, which commences January 1, 2009. Of key interest are the five priorities for the Czechs - Competitiveness of the EU, Energy Security and Sustainability, Reform of the EU Budget and Agricultural Policy, Foreign Policy (Transatlantic Relations, the Balkans, and the Eastern Neighborhood), and Third Pillar issues (immigration and the post-Hague Program) - and what is not on the agenda - Russia, nor Promotion of Human Rights and Democracy.

EU Competitiveness, Budget Reform and Ag Policy

[1](#)2. (SBU) As EU competitiveness is the top priority for the Czechs, Sedlacek stated that in this area the Czechs will focus on the free movement of capital and labor, in keeping with the overall theme for the Czech EU Presidency "Europe Without Barriers." They also plan to press for re-evaluation of EU funding allocations. As one example, Sedlacek noted that the Czechs would like to see a greater proportion of EU funds allocated for educational purposes. This also folds in with the Czech priority of "Reform of the EU Budget and Agricultural Policy." Although EU Agricultural Policy is up for EU discussion prior to Czech assumption of the Presidency, Sedlacek acknowledged that the French are likely to face the same credibility problems that the British encountered during the last debate on Agricultural Policy. The Czechs fully anticipate that this issue will remain unresolved in 2008 and fall to their Presidency in 2009. Comment: We can expect that the new Czech Ambassador to the EU, Milena Vicenova, as the former Czech Minister of Agriculture, will be actively engaged in Brussels in this area (reftel A). End Comment.

Balkans, Eastern Neighborhood, Transatlantic Relations

[1](#)3. (SBU) In the area of foreign policy, the Czechs have three priorities - The Balkans, the Eastern Neighborhood and Transatlantic Relations. Sedlacek acknowledged the importance of getting things right now on Kosovo as he fully expects the Kosovars to declare independence in December, if nothing comes of the ongoing negotiations. The Czechs recognize the impending train wreck of a Kosovar declaration

without a united EU position on how to respond and worry that this lack of EU consensus is allowing Russia, by default, to manipulate the situation in unhelpful ways. The GOCR thus believes the situation of the entire region will require attention for quite some time to come. The key Eastern Neighborhood countries for the Czechs are Belarus (where the Czechs are notably engaged promoting the concepts of democracy and human rights), Ukraine and Moldova. Other than "enhancing" transatlantic relations, the Czechs lack specifics at this moment as to what and how they wish to work with us in this area. Sedlacek noted, however, that the Czechs expect the French to take an active, and overall constructive approach to transatlantic relations.

Third Pillar - A "Free and Secure" Europe

¶4. (SBU) The Czechs seek to advance the idea of a "Free and Secure" Europe and immigration will be a major topic of discussion. Sedlacek's reference to the post-Hague program, indicates Czech interest in addressing database sharing/privacy rights issues.

¶5. (SBU) Interestingly, it appears that the Czechs have some reservations about Third Pillar EU competencies. Sedlacek stated that the Czechs and Poles have both explored Article 10, which allows the European Commission to sue within the European Court of Law to force a country to implement EU legislation, if that country does not act in a sufficiently expeditious manner. Both countries apparently have serious reservations about this article and would like to have an opt out, along the lines of what Britain is allowed. How, or even whether, they will pursue this interest was not clarified.

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Reform Treaty - To Steadily Advance

¶6. (U) Sedlacek indicated that the "Reform Treaty" was initially the Czech government's sixth priority, but the Czech Government dropped this as an issue since they do not expect changes to the June draft. They predict that things will proceed on course at the Intergovernmental Conference of the Heads of State or Government October 18 in Lisbon, followed by a ceremonial treaty signing in December. The only controversy, in Sedlacek's mind, is how this will be ratified by EU member states - whether by public referenda or by member state parliaments - and when it will be implemented.

¶7. (U) The Czechs have spoken with the French (who hold the EU Presidency from June 2008 and who are eager to proceed with implementation of the treaty with all due haste), to indicate that the Czechs think given the upcoming EU Parliamentary Elections anticipated in June 2009 and the formation of a new EU Commission soon thereafter, that implementation of the treaty should not commence before this point in time. Comment: The Czechs also desire this date because they wish to have their Prime Minister preside over the European Council during their first-ever EU Presidency, rather than a President selected by EU members, as foreseen in the Reform Treaty. End Comment.

Notably Unstated - Human Rights and Russia

¶8. (SBU) While the Czechs are fierce advocates for Human Rights and Democracy issues, these issues do not figure in their stated top priorities, except perhaps tangentially in the foreign policy area. For the Czechs, advancing relations with the EU's Eastern Neighborhood, will very likely involve a discussion of Democracy and Human Rights issues in Belarus.

Also of interest is the fact that the Czechs have not prioritized relations with Russia as a key issue. When queried about this, Sedlacek referenced the GOCR priority of "Energy Security and Sustainability." He did not, however, go into further depth on how they plan to address Energy Security, and even so, this topic involves only one of numerous aspects of the EU's relationship with Russia.

Comment - The Right Moves

19. (SBU) Preparations for the Czech EU Presidency, while nascent and still 15 months off, are commencing on the right foot. The GOCR has identified skilled and experienced diplomats here in Prague within the Deputy Prime Minister's office and the MFA to lead the preparations. These offices are currently small, but will grow since additional staff have been allocated. As well, the Czechs have begun meeting with the French and Swedes to coordinate on EU Presidency matters. At this point, the Czechs have deliberated defined their agenda broadly since they fully anticipate that world events over the next year, particularly in the foreign policy sphere, as well as key EU events (EU Parliament elections, EU Commission selection, appointment of a new High Rep for CFSP, etc.) could force the Czechs to reshape their agenda.
Grabner